

MOTHERS AND CHILDREN
DRAWING PAPERS





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MOTHERS AND CHILDREN





TO MIAU
AMIGOSUAS



Frank Danby.
photograph by Hopper.

MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

HITHERTO UNPUBLISHED STORIES
BY THE LATE "FRANK DANBY"

WITH A PREFACE BY HER ELDEST SON
GILBERT FRANKAU



LONDON: 48 PALL MALL

W. COLLINS SONS & CO. LTD.

GLASGOW

MELBOURNE

AUCKLAND

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JO MULL
AMERICAN

PREFACE

WHATEVER verdict posterity—sternest, justest of juries—may pass on “Frank Danby’s” literary achievements, there can be no two opinions about her genius for motherhood. For her children, from the first days she bore them in pain to the last nights when she parted from them in agony, no burden she could carry was ever too heavy, no sacrifice she could make ever too exacting. All she possessed, of heart, of intellect, of influence or of money, she poured out for us, unstinting, in one bright continuous stream.

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Of necessity, her career as an authoress paid penalty for this splendid giving ; since to no woman is it granted that she achieve supreme success both as mother and as artist. Between these two dominating passions the soul wavers like a magnetic needle between two poles, vibrating now towards one, now towards the other—so that, in the case of the average woman-writer, neither destiny is fulfilled completely, and she dies as she has lived, a mediocre mother, a mediocre artist, to be as soon forgotten by the children she has neglected as by the readers she has failed to capture.

“Frank Danby’s” memory fears no such fate. Nobody reading *Doctor Phillips*, *Pigs in Clover*, *Twilight*, can fail to realise how very nearly she accomplished her mission as a novelist ; nobody

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who understands the love, the reverence for her, which lives in the hearts of us, her children, can fail to know how utterly she succeeded in her destiny as a mother.

At the very outset of her public career, “Frank Danby’s” keen brain faced these two primal issues ; made the self-sacrificing, the irrevocable decision ; robbed herself, robbed the world—that we might be the richer.

With my mother’s intellectual vision, her courage, her power over the medium in which she worked, there was no height either of “literary” or “popular” success (at long last, both are one) to which she might not have aspired. One attribute, and one only, of genius, she lacked—selfishness. And so (this is her judgment, not my own) none of her work was ever “finished.” It came to

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her, seething from the inner consciousness, demanding expression ; dashed itself to paper ; and then . . . then the mother-heart intervened, crying : " Let be ! go back to your children." And she, bound by that first irrevocable decision, gave her heart its desire, let it command " Enough " to the clamouring brain.

Of the many sacrifices she made for us, surely this was the grandest. God knows, I am grateful ; yet there come moments when I shudder at the thought of it, when I most bitterly regret this chain our helplessness bound on her willing hands. Pray God, that her soul, looking down from the Place of All Knowledge, harbour not the same regrets. . . .

To me, *Mothers and Children*—dic-
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PREFACE

tated some years since, put away, yet spared by its authoress at her last ruthless burning of unpublished manuscripts—reveal more of “Frank Danby’s” true personality than all the rest of her writings. That is why, after many months of anxious consideration, I have decided on their publication.

They are barely stories, little more than raw material—unpolished studies for some great picture she conceived but was not allowed to execute ; yet there is scarcely a phase of the relationship between mother and child on which they do not touch revealingly. Whether the dominant emotion in that relationship be, as in “Arthur,” ambition ; as in “Marguerite,” pity ; sacrifice, as in “Douglas” ; or just sheer love as in “My Charlie,”—each note rings utterly true, the artist-insight is never at fault.

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Yet insight is not the only merit of them ; carefully perused, each study possesses its own definite educational value. And I defy any woman, mother or childless, to look up dry-eyed when she has read the last word of “Gerald.”

But one story of mother-love, her best, “Frank Danby” has left for me to tell. Here you have it, briefly, haltingly, unworthily—this tale which Shakespeare’s self might not have held inadequate to his pen.

When war broke out, my mother had been an invalid for six months. She cherished no illusions about her health ; face to face with a painful, lingering death, she eyed it understandingly, calmly, resolutely ; discussed it openly with astounded doctors, reasoned it out undismayed with sorrow-stricken relatives. “At least,” she would say, “I

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shall die as I have always wished to die,
with my family about me."

It was the middle of August 1914 : politicians and public alike beguiling themselves with the idea of a short war, "over by Christmas." For her, the first haemorrhage had already hoisted its red danger-signal. She lay recovering from it, pillow'd on her water-bed, drugged into semi-consciousness. But no drug could quite check the functioning of that clear-seeing brain, as no bodily suffering could torture that indomitable heart to egotism.

The nurse, making ready for the night, heard her call ; went to her.

"They must all go," she whispered.

The nurse, uncomprehending, asked :
"Who must go ? Where ? "

"My sons," she whispered. "My three sons. They must all go to the

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war. They mustn't feel that I am a drag on their manhood. England needs them. . . .”

For a year and a half after that night, she lived ; lived to write her last best book ; losing ground daily, losing courage never ; asking nothing, giving all. The tears she shed when, one by one, we came to bid her good-bye, she shed in solitude ; the terrors that tore her *for us*, she faced alone. If, for herself, she feared death, she never voiced that fear ; but went to her heaven uncomplainingly, humble yet self-reliant—a fighter to the end.

• • • • •
Words—mine or her own—can do scant justice to such a woman. Yet I hope, I believe, that she will be glad to see these words, hers and mine, in print. The age in which we live justifies, of

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itself, their publication. For surely as we are resolved to battle down these proud ravishers of women and of children against whom all Decency is allied to-day, so surely are we fighting, not selfishly, but for those millions of mothers and children who will bless us in the years to be—and of whom some few perchance may draw knowledge and inspiration from these brain-children of that great mother, “Frank Danby.”

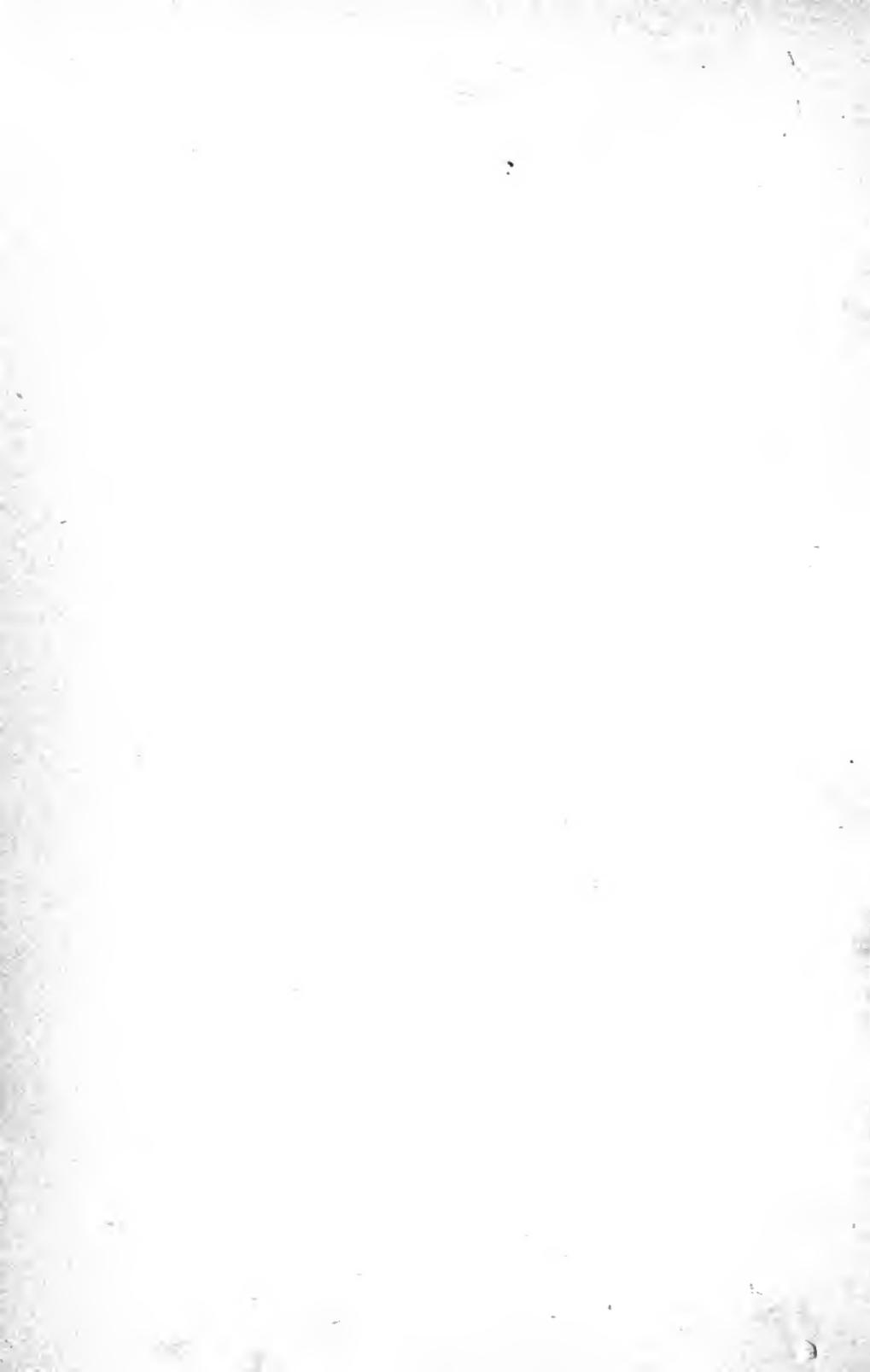
GILBERT FRANKAU.

11.11.17.



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I

ARTHUR

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B



I

ARTHUR

ARTHUR is only seven ; he is fair and plain and pale ; a gap represents the place where his front teeth ought to be. He is preternaturally intelligent, and has the self-possession of an Irish beggar. He has execrable manners ; habitually forgets to say "How do you do ?" when he enters a room. Whatever idea possesses his mind for the moment, absorbs it to the exclusion of the rest of the world ; and he becomes "Don Quixote de la Mancha" with as much ease as he grows into a Gulliver. With a score of tin soldiers in his hands, he will explain to you that he has captured

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the Lilliputians ; and taking your interest for granted, will invite you to his nursery for further demonstration, as if he were conferring a favour. Human nature has never appeared to him in anything but a friendly light ; should he require a seat, he will perch himself on the first available knee, with the certainty that its owner—of whatsoever age or sex—will regard the action as a compliment.

Yet, such as he is, he has the whole of his mother's heart. She sees no fault in him, and can imagine none. He represents love to her, and ambition, and every earthly passion. He has managed to absorb not only the foreground but the whole of the canvas which stands to her for life.

She is a cold woman, this mother of Arthur's, intellectually superior to her surroundings, but with an unfortunate distortion of vision that makes her see

ARTHUR

the vices of her neighbours more clearly than their virtues. She despises most of her fellow-creatures, and hates them for their faults. She has brothers and sisters, easy-going, warm-hearted people. She looks upon their generosity to each other as criminal recklessness, on their mutual toleration as lack of principle. They admit her theoretically in the right, but are not personally fond of her. Nobody *is* fond of her ; she inspires respect, but her keen self-appreciation repels affection.

Perhaps she has cause for her aloofness, for her harsh judgment ; perhaps her bitterness is only the cloak for an early love that was slighted, an early belief that was shattered. There are people who can remember Joan Danvers as reckless as she was improvident, as merry and as popular as the rest of her family ; but that was long ago, many years before she married

TO MARY
ANNABELLE

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David Ferrars and became the mother of Arthur.

When Arthur first came to her, even maternity seemed powerless to melt the ice that had gathered about her heart. She openly declared her dislike of babies ; turned the newcomer out of her bedroom before it was a week old ; left it to the mercy of servants while she went abroad to recuperate her health. It was nine months old before it began to inspire her with the passion that now dominates her so exclusively. What precise moment of emotion lit the spark, it is impossible to say. Perhaps the glow of pride when one of her acquaintances exclaimed that they had never seen a child commence to walk so young ; perhaps the first sound of "Mum, Mum," as it issued from the baby-lips, woke her dormant womanhood ; perhaps it was the outstretched arms the baby held to her, and the crow with which it

ARTHUR

asked to be taken up. But whatever may have been the cause, the effect was electrical ; and from that moment to this, the little boy has been as an idol to her.

Yet a woman like Joan might have been expected to train a child with intelligence if not with strictness, to have taught him his duty to his elders,—respect, and a measurable amount of obedience. But Mrs. Ferrars has disappointed all such expectations.

Her great love outweighed all her intellect. She could not bear to reprove him herself ; would not tolerate that others should do so. From the first, Arthur's world lay in his mother's eyes ; and there he read himself centre of the universe. . . .

The child is a lovable one, despite his faults, despite his curious training ; and between him and his mother exists an affinity, an understanding, which is infinitely touching.

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He is a delicate little fellow ; so delicate that it makes one's heart ache sometimes to think how frail is the barque on which Joan has freighted all her hopes. He has had many illnesses, and bears pain badly, as all nervous and excitable children bear pain. Then it is, that he clings to his mother ; then it is, that this cold hard woman is moved out of every semblance of self-control. When he moans or cries, her hands tremble, her lips turn white ; she suffers an agony beside which his pains are small.

“ Oh, Mumsey, I can’t bear it, I can’t bear it,” he will cry out ; and she, kneeling beside him, trying to soothe him, will pray in the very madness of her sympathy that he may die rather than be in pain.

She is a miser over the child ; grudges his going out to spend the afternoon in another nursery ; resents with an im-

ARTHUR

placable animosity even a hint that his manners are not the acme of perfection.

At one time in her life, Mrs. Ferrars had literary ambitions. She wrote, but her pen was dipped in gall. The bitterness of her spirit peeped out in her unlovely books, and spelt failure for her. She had social ambitions, but her brothers' erratic careers rendered that dream abortive. Now, in the small figure of her boy, she sees the fructification of all her ambitions, all her dreams. She is a woman of means ; she saves rather than spends, gives away nothing, wastes nothing. Arthur is to be a Benjamin Disraeli, to startle the world political and the world literary ; and she must see that want of money shall not hamper his career.

But if she takes no pains with the formation of his manners, she takes an infinity over the development of his intellect. He goes to a day school, of

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which he is already the “show” boy ; she superintends his home lessons and urges him to effort by every means at her command. She makes no secret of her wishes ; and the boy will tell you : “I am going to be a Prime Minister, Mumsey says so.”

If you inquire further, he will probably admit that he would rather be a knight-errant though that is not so grand ; and there are times when he sees something attractive in Robinson Crusoe. But always, though with a sigh of regret, he will give up these delights, because “Mumsey” wants him to be a Prime Minister.

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Is it wonderful, or is it painful to see these two ? Knowing the vicissitudes of life, I think the latter. Can the career of this boy, brilliant though it may be, turn out anything but a disappointment to his mother, who has placed her hopes

ARTHUR

so high ? And even if his career should satisfy her, will his *character* continue to seem perfect ? The selfishness that she now fosters, may jar upon her when it increases to her own exclusion ; the mental quality upon which she now lays such stress, may not seem so convincing when, at some juncture in life where the pathways divide, he will not let her mature judgment guide his youthful one. Her pride is the keynote of her love ; if he should disappoint the one, the other might fail—for she is not a loving woman.

But I prefer to look upon the other possibility ; I prefer to think of the little pale-faced boy, grown to sturdy manhood, teaching his mother, by the very strength of her satisfaction in him, a kinder and gentler view of all the world. I prefer to see the charm of affection between these two grown so as to include the whole of humanity.

MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

And in that future I can see even a possibility of her literary taste reviving ; purged of bitterness by the purer stream of her love ; its strength and power remaining, its clear judgment and keen wit still predominant—but all blent into one harmonious whole by the love and sympathy and understanding that she receives from “ My son Arthur.”

II

BOBBY



II

BOBBY

ALAS ! No one but his mother can see Bobby now, for Bobby has been dead eighteen years. Eighteen years ago, Bobby was four, a brown-eyed child, lisping baby-talk—not much sense in it perhaps, but unutterably sweet to her—those thin, soft baby-lips that cooled themselves on Mummy's cheek, that tired baby-head that rested on Mummy's breast. Such a little wee child, so long dead yet such a loving memory !

Did Robert Browning know of Phyllis Vane's child when he wrote of the one “ that was given to me to lead me gently backward to the Heavenly Father's

MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

knee " ? She thinks he did ; she thinks that line of his beautiful poem was written for her. The divine genius of sympathy that breathes through the verse, touched her to the only tears she shed in those first dry-eyed stony months of her bereavement, when neither sympathy nor religion could heal the cancer that lay hid in her breast, aching with an anguish that only the poet's voice could soothe. They told her that God had taken the boy in mercy ; to their earth-blinded eyes it seemed a mercy to take her only solace from the mother who could prove no right to it. Poor wife who had no husband ! poor mother who had no rights—and now no baby boy to justify her struggle for them. . . .

Phyllis Vane's story was no common one of vulgar seduction, of vulgar desertion. John Vane had been an honest man who wooed her in her father's

BOBBY

house, and wedded her in her father's church before the whole parish—twelve months after the day on which he heard that his first wife had perished in the wreck of the *Oceana*. It was the latter end of the nineteenth century ; too modern a time for marvellous tales of small boats surviving in stormy seas, of delicate women withstanding the exposure of shipwreck, the discomforts of life on a desert island. But though out of date and incredible, such a tale came true ; and Nora Vane lived to reappear in the village of Gadsby, to enter like a ghost upon the scene of Phyllis Vane's happiness and turn it into tragedy and horror.

In the depths of her desolation, Phyllis almost died ; would have died, even as an atheist dies, without belief or hope, but for Bobby. Bobby saved her, lay on her breast, so white and weak, thrilling her with a mother's love that

MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

gave her strength. Back in her father's parsonage, not a widow, not a wife, a little figure that clung to her gown and hid its shy face in the folds, that held to her and depended on her, saved her from despair. She had no husband. John, whose strong arm had been hers to lean upon, whose smiling eyes and mouth had filled her full, John, her John, was Nora's. But Bobby was *hers*; and as she said passionately, "No one could take him from her."

Alas ! No one could take Bobby from her ! How often she said that, said it defiantly when her pain was hard to bear, said it softly when baby nestled in her arms, said it triumphantly when she heard that Nora was childless. Then Bobby, frail little Bobby, sickened : fretful words instead of loving ones, drooping head and feeble step instead of childish laughter, drove the dreadful truth home.

Poor Phyllis, she could not credit it,

BOBBY

could not think that it was meant. Three years, she had not seen John ; had not heard of John ; had schooled herself to bear it, treasuring him in her memory, trying to think of him as lost, trying to make Bobby fill all his place. Bobby, little sonny, God's message of comfort and peace. . . .

And now, Bobby lay dying. The window was open to the sweet spring air. Outside, birds sang ; young lambs frisked ; flowers stood riotous in the sunshine ; within, the pale child rested in his mother's arms, and drew his last feeble breaths painfully, so painfully that each one stabbed her as she felt it. "Mummy, Mummy," he said, so low that she only just heard it, "father's coming, father's coming" ; opened his blue eyes ; smiled ; gasped ; and gasping, died.

Then they preached to her of God's mercy, and thanked Him for her, when

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they took the boy out of her arms, and laid him away from his Mummy in the damp churchyard—alone.

Three terrible months passed : a stone where her heart had been. Then Bobby came back. First he came in the night ; he woke her from a terrible sobbing dream ; he nestled again in her arms ; he whispered to her—baby broken words. Then she saw him in the day, felt him clinging to her dress, and the touch of his little hands in hers. They heard her talking to him ; they said she was mad ; she could smile now, as she had not smiled for months. Only the poet knew !

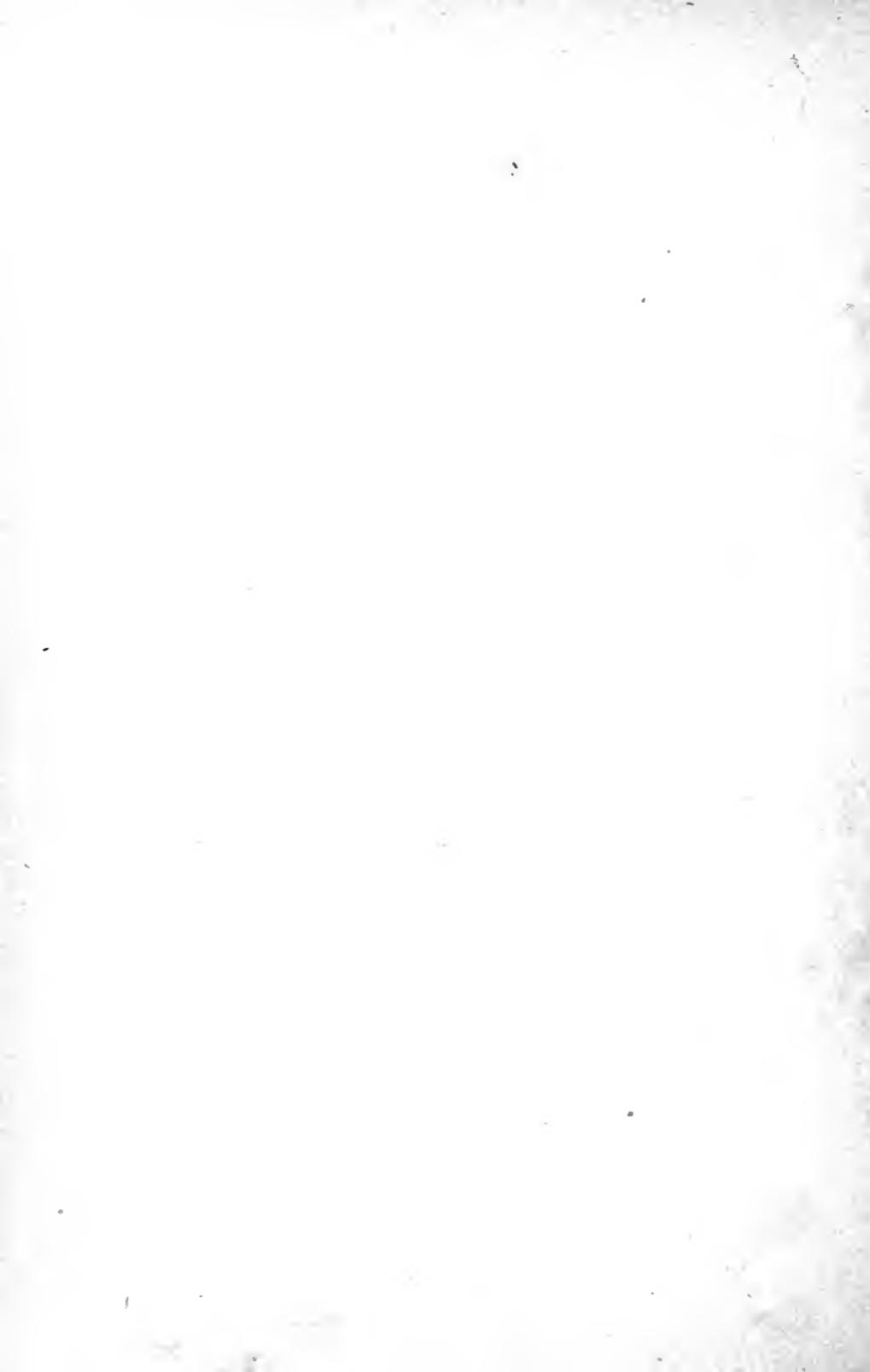
A troop of wandering angels stole her little son
away,
But they left in its stead a changeling,
A little angel child
That seemed like his bud in full blossom,
And smiled as he only smiled.

She was not mad : Nature and the poet gave her solace. So that when

BOBBY

Nora died, when John came back to her, once more life opened, blossomed full. And always she believed that it was Bobby who told her ; Bobby who said, " Father is coming " ; Bobby, whom, after all, no one could take away from her, who

Lies in her little one's cradle,
And sits in her little one's chair ;
And the light of the Heaven he's gone to,
Transfigures his golden hair.



III

MAUD

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III

MAUD

MAUD was her mother's idol, and a fair idol. Her soft young face, red lips and glossy curls, her smiles and dimples, her quick, graceful movements, her delicate fondlings, were all verses in the sweet poem sent to Mrs. Devereux in compensation for her early widowhood.

Of course, Mrs. Devereux's friends considered Maud "spoilt," that Maud would grow up self-willed and captious, that her mother would ruin her by indulgence and by letting her have her own way in everything. And it was true that she indulged Maud to the

MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

fullest possible extent. The girl's life became a perfect litany of love, caresses and gentle words her only portion. She knew herself from the very first day of her babyhood the light of her mother's eyes, the heart of her mother's heart. That young widow, fair and young though she was, had no wish for other love-words than Maud's, no thought for other lovers than the baby lover who clambered on her knees. Maud, waking in the night, would never wake to find herself alone among the shadows. Against the glow of the night-light she would always see that mother face looking down on her, smiling on her, guarding her, watching her as the one treasure dearest on earth.

This was Maud's education. Was it a bad one? Time answered that question, answered it definitely.

Maud was never punished in her childhood. If she did not learn her lessons

MAUD

freely, then the lessons would be put away. If she broke her toys and wept to see the doll with its battered head, or the tea-set with its broken cups, her mother would cry with her, understanding the trouble a great one. A new doll would be bought ; or the tea-set mended, and Maud would have all the happiness of cementing it together. Or they would pretend there had been a dinner-party, and that the servant had fallen upstairs with the tray, and then Maud would scold her or inquire in a little squeaky voice if she were hurt : and Mrs. Devereux would be the servant and excuse herself ;—and so that trouble too would be turned into a pleasure.

And from childhood, Maud grew to girlhood. What her education had done for her was to develop a sympathy and a gentleness to all humanity—echo of the mother-love whose words had been music to her baby ears.

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Mrs. Devereux did not cease to be companion and friend, now that Maud needed both more than ever. She went with her into society, saw her dancing, and listened afterwards to girlish confidences of what her partners had whispered or implied. These confidences were never checked or laughed at, they were understood. So Mrs. Devereux was the first to hear of Gerald Tracy's hand-pressures and the number of times he had asked Maud to dance, and what he had said to her at supper. And Mrs. Devereux grew glad, for now the shadow of a great trouble travelled always at her side, and she wanted Maud, her Maud, her darling, to be away from her, safe in another home, before the shadow clouded all. So Gerald was invited to the house ; was allowed to whisper his love-words unmolested ; found mother as well as daughter to smile at him and give him welcome.

MAUD

Maud's love-story was like Maud's life, perfect, an idyll in which she found no flaw.

"Yes, she can bear prosperity," said those same friends who had complained that she was being spoiled, who envied her happiness, "but how will she bear adversity?" Poor Maud, even a mother with her body as shield cannot save us from our inheritance.

"Mother, darling"—she said, that evening when Gerald had asked her to marry him, and been satisfied with the answer, and gone away content—"Mother, darling," she said, as they sat together in the bedroom, Mrs. Devereux on an easy-chair, Maud on the footstool beside her, hiding her face, a fair face with its shy blushes, "I love him."

"I am glad, I am glad."

Maud never saw the tears that gathered in her mother's eyes, never noticed how

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uncertainly the hand crept about until it rested on her hair ; for Maud's face was hidden.

But as the days wore on and Gerald urged a speedy marriage, and Mrs. Devereux seconded his urging, Maud began to notice something, something that made her heart sink, that struck her in the midst of her joy, that turned her being cold, and terrified her with the first terror she had ever known. She noticed, so gradually that she could not tell when the first fear crept in, that her mother held the banisters as she went upstairs, came into the room with her hand outstretched as if seeking for some guide to lead her to her place. And more gradually still, Maud saw there was a film over those dear eyes, that her mother had ceased to read, to work, that she would sit long hours as she had never sat before, hands folded in her lap, listening, talking, but doing nothing.

MAUD

The first time she had trembled before her mother was when she knelt down beside her, and looking up to her, said, "Mother, tell me, tell me, what is it?"

The cry came from her heart; she saw her mother's cheek pale; the words seemed wrung from her as she answered: "I did not mean to tell you."

"Not tell *me*? Not tell *me*?" Maud's arms were about her, Maud's face against hers, "me who have told you everything?"

"To save you trouble, to save you trouble," was the broken answer: and they wept together.

Mrs. Devereux was going blind. If first she had seen Maud married, known Maud happy, she would have passed into her darkness without a word. But mother and child cannot live together for eighteen loving years and part like this. Maud *saw*; her mother's eyes

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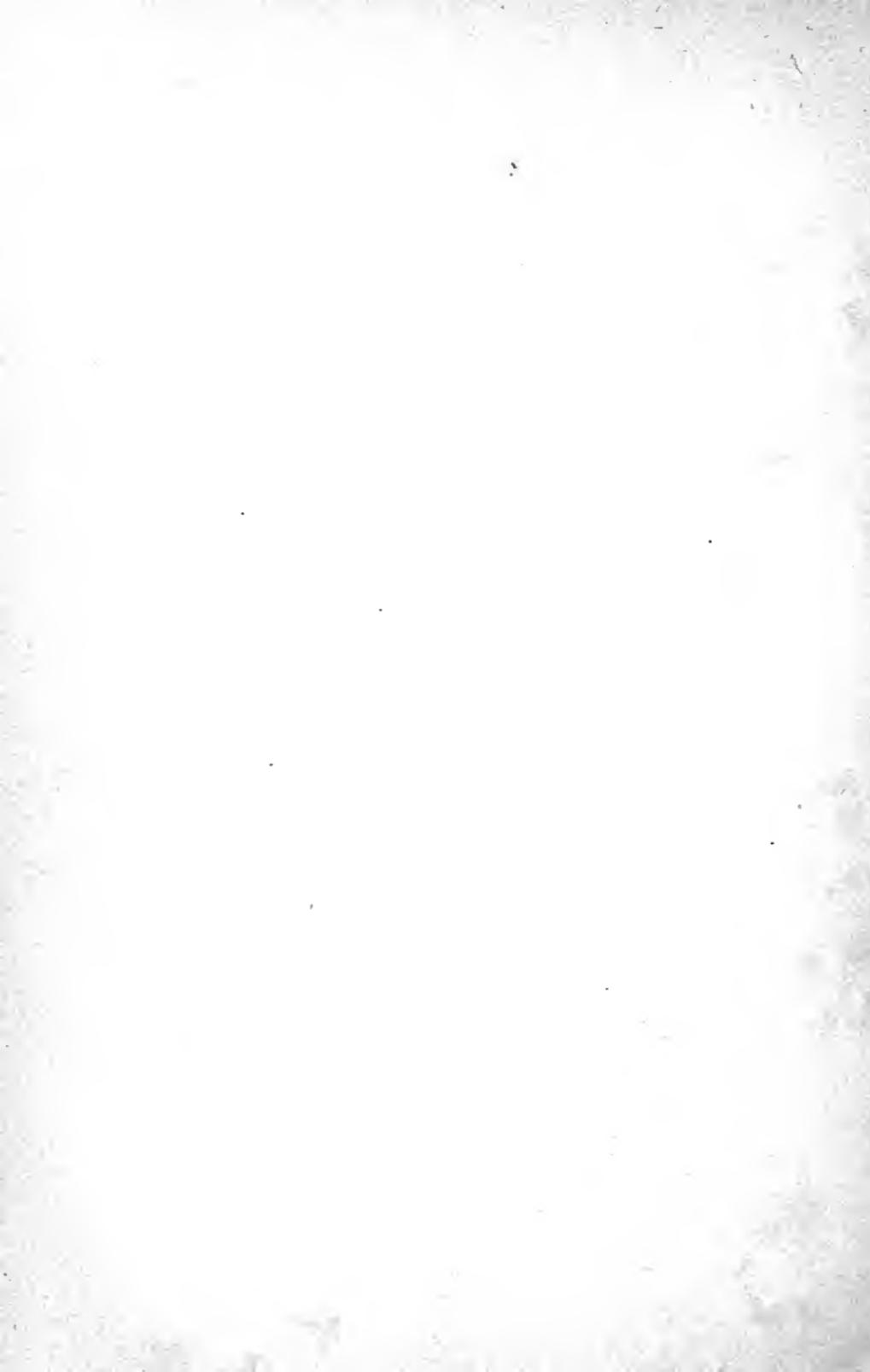
had been her eyes in baby days when her feet were guided ; now Maud should be her mother's eyes.

If marriage went out of the girl's life ; if Gerald was not strong enough to take upon himself the burden of a wife who would not live apart from her mother ; can it be said that Maud missed the highest that life could give ? Maud is twenty-three now ; for five years she has lived to be her mother's guide, so close to her that they are never to be seen apart,—the young girl leading the weak steps of the woman ; the woman with a light in her face, if not in her eyes, that speaks of happiness more of Heaven than of earth. . . .

Maud has given up Gerald and youth and youthfulness. But I think I see a future before her, better than that which she gave up. I see a nobler lover than Gerald, watching her and her blind mother, waiting till he dare ask both

MAUD

of them to cheer his home, seeing (as even those old gossips can see now) that Maud has not been spoilt by the love her mother lavished upon her. For love, pure, unselfish and beautiful, never spoilt any human being; it had nourished Maud, and strengthened her, and taught her, when the time came, both duty and happiness.



IV

JANEY

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IV

JANEY

THE very existence of Janey is a mystery to those social philosophers who never see beneath the surface of people among whom they dwell.

Celia Brooks was so plain a girl, so awkward, so unattractive, and at the time of her marriage so obviously an "old maid," so literal and staid, that to this day no one can understand what induced Hubert Gould to select such a partner. Perhaps it was mere perverseness, a desire to see what his friends would say, a reckless disregard of consequences, that led him into it. He liked to be the hero of a nine days' wonder,

MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

and he had arrived at a position where he found it difficult. Of course he was very handsome, very clever, very fascinating, had been the chief performer in half-a-dozen escapades and the hero of half-a-dozen scandals. But all that had been in his younger days, before he ran through the last remnants of his fortune, when he still had a position in society, still held a commission in the Guards. He was forty when he made up his mind to marry his cousin Celia—"old Celia" as her friends called her—and he was getting bald about the temples, and lined about the eyes. He had not much money left, and people, the right people, had begun to look shyly at him.

Still it was an extraordinary match, every one agreed about that. It was not as if "old Celia" had money or influence, or anything that could have attracted him; she had not the great compensation for plain women—clever-

JANEY

ness ; she was not even excessively amiable. She had not “ adored him from his boyhood ” ; quite the contrary, she was a person with the stern incorruptibility of the untempted ; and had heard every story about him with thin lips set in disapproval and cold condemning eyes.

People said the whole thing must be due to the manœuvring of Mrs. Brooks, who had grown tired of Celia’s bent shoulders and black looks, her contrary virtues and aggressive good qualities. Mrs. Brooks was a very different type of woman to her step-daughter—a cheery woman with a ready laugh and a healthy way of looking at life. She was immensely fond of her new son-in-law, and the two had always been excellent friends.

Well, to make the story short, Hubert married Celia, and repented before the gossip had ceased. He not only re-

MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

pented of his marriage, but he made Celia repent of it ; and bitterly ; although she was no longer open to the reproach of being called an old maid, and had had a month's honeymoon with “the most fascinating man in London.”

The fascination wore off on close acquaintance. She thought him a very degraded specimen of humanity when he told her stories and laughed at her horror of them. His habits, his ideas, his mode of life were hideous and hateful to her. She could not refrain from saying it ; and he was not the man to bear her condemnation without reply. Poor “old Celia” ! She suffered as much as it is in the nature of such women to suffer. Then, without taking counsel with any one, without letting a soul know of her intention, or of the provocation for it, she left him.

She left him six months after she had sworn before the altar to love, honour,

JANEY

and obey, to cling to him till death they two should part ; she failed him—this narrow woman to whom the straight path of virtue appealed for its straightness and not for its virtue, who had no heart, no divine power of forgiveness, none of the gentleness that is the prerogative of her sex, no softness and no yielding.

She was condemned by some, laughed at by others—and sympathised with by none. The physical martyrdom she went through when Janey was born, she went through alone. Not as a message of peace did the child appear to her, rather as a legacy of sin and hate, and all the degradation of her short married life. She had no love for the poor little mite ; the feeling with which she regarded it seemed rather one of shuddering disgust—was it not its father's daughter ?

Poor little mite ! Celia did her duty

MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

by it. Imagine how much warmth and sunshine lies about the pale life of a little child whose mother *does her duty by it!* Janey inherited her mother's plainness; and pretty clothes did not come under the category of Celia's "duty." She clad the little girl in loose garments, hygienic and hideous; she cut her hair short, and had her educated. At five the wan-eyed, brown-skinned child spent six mortal hours out of every day in the schoolroom. She had her mother's brains too, and her tasks were hard for her. She grew lean and thin and miserable over her struggles with the alphabet; and her slate was greasy with tears shed over the mysteries of the multiplication table.

"Your father is a very bad man, and I must punish you so that you don't grow up like him—lazy and selfish and untruthful." That was the doctrine for the baby ears, the doctrine that formed

JANEY

Celia's lullaby, that stood Janey in lieu of mother-love and caresses.

The home, so empty, so cold, so drear, where the released wife—for she managed to divorce Hubert after a lapse of time—is bringing up her only child, has the silence and cold of a convent without the hope that illumines its grey walls. Under the shadow of it, Janey is growing up to a future that to her frozen child-heart looms as dreary as the present. Celia's unlovely age, creeping on her in hard lines about the thin lips, seems to her daughter like a horrible image of her own fate. “Mother” means nothing to her but harshness and task-giving. She has no memories of encircling arms, of dark nights made beautiful by a figure that knelt by her bedside, of kisses or tenderness; she has none of the dreams that environ happy little children.

And so—and so Janey has made a

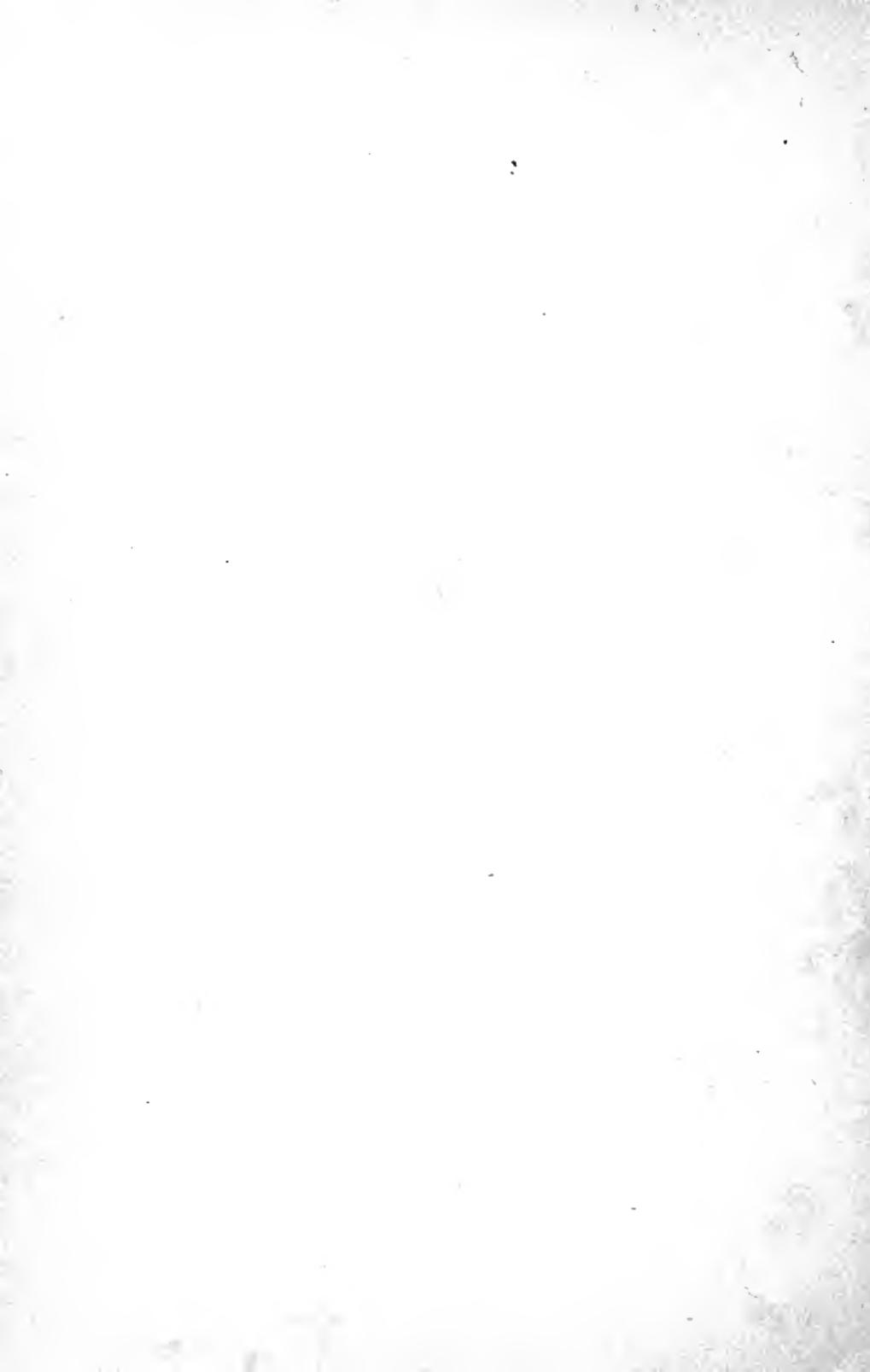
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dream-world of her own. What would Celia say if she knew that Janey's dream is to grow up and to run away, to "find father"? In her dreams she is out in the light and in the warmth, away from mother, from the very place where mother dwells ; she is sitting with father, at his feet, holding his hands, kissing them, crying over them, telling him that she never believed he was to blame, that she never thought he could have done anything wrong, that she too knows "mother" is bitter and unforgiving, but that she, Janey, will love him and tend him and stay with him and make up to him for all the troubles he has had. She pictures his answering kisses, his joy in her faithfulness to him, she pictures a life where love dwells—a life from which Celia has vanished for ever.

V

MARGUÉRITE

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V

MARGUÉRITE

MRS. TEMPLE was a fashionable woman. That is to say, she lived in Mayfair and went every evening to a different place of amusement, sometimes to two or three. Balls, theatres and dinner-parties made the sum of her existence. She was a good woman, and loved her husband dearly ; she would have made any sacrifice for him, but the only sacrifice he exacted was that she should immolate herself on the altar of the world, and offer herself up as a victim to the Goddess of the Passing Hour. He was ambitious, a man of good birth, good breeding, with the fortune of a younger

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son, and only the profession of barrister wherewith to mend it. That his wife should be well-dressed, that she should be “in the swim,” that she should use her social talents to aid his forensic ones, seemed to him her whole duty.

And for a time she thought with him: or more probably she did not think at all. Quite suddenly, quite unexpectedly, she awoke to a different view, awoke to see the whole of her life from a fresh angle; to be alone in crowds, to be perhaps still with *le monde qui s'amuse*, but no longer of it.

Marguérite was the cause of her awakening—the little one, with the blue, wistful eyes, who three years ago had been an unwelcome interruption to her social life. It had been a short interruption; very soon Mrs. Temple had been up and about again, looking just a little paler in her loveliness, but not otherwise altered or deepened through

MARGUÉRITE

maternity. Marguérite had her fine nurseries, and her expensive nurse ; morning and evening, unless some very pressing engagement intervened, Mrs. Temple saw her for a hurried moment, kissed her, and perhaps took her in her arms. Baby's bottle was dearer to her than her mother ; laughingly Mrs. Temple would comment on the fact ; it had no significance for her, it did not hurt her.

So the time sped by, and Marguérite grew in beauty : the golden curls lengthened ; and the little one, no longer carried, held up her head and trotted demurely about the nursery. From seeing her morning and evening, Mrs. Temple began to send for her in the afternoons ; made her come down on "at home" days to be exhibited to her mother's friends, in white lace frock and satin sash. She was a sweet little figure, and as everybody said, never had there

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been such a good child, not a bit shy and never fretful, always ready to go to this one or to that ; to be petted and made much of. And so, quite imperceptibly, Marguerite stole into her mother's heart.

Mrs. Temple was not a demonstrative woman. Many had been found to call her a cold woman. Only her husband and just a few intimates realised the warmth, the passion of her nature. Still, she was not quickly emotional : even motherhood moved her only gradually.

She became conscious of a warmer glow over her heart when "Margy" broke away from visitors to nestle against her mother's knee. She began to feel something like a thrill of excitement when the little warm hand was put nervously into hers, when Margy seemed to need her. Her evening visit to the nursery grew longer ; Margy would now be brought to her in the morning also, whilst she dressed ; she would even

MARGUÉRITE

find an excuse to run upstairs for a moment at luncheon-time, peep at the child perched on a high chair with a feeder on, eating her minced chicken daintily—for she was a very dainty child, dainty in all her ways.

As Marguérite grew clearer on the horizon of Mrs. Temple's mind, she found herself constantly thinking of the child, talking of her a little to John, who had a certain sympathy, perfunctory and external. Mrs. Temple began to picture herself as a chaperone, half-closed her eyes, and dreamily saw, when the band played, the slender fair-haired girl dancing with the best match of the season ! Yes ; *with the best match of the season* : that was what it came to. Ambition enkindled the mother's love, and Marguérite's beauty set it ablaze. Only the fire went deeper, deeper than even Mrs. Temple knew.

Marguérite was three years old and

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filling her mother's every thought, when the shock came that turned ambition into ashes, into Dead Sea fruit—at the very sight of which one shuddered and turned away.

"Isn't your little girl very backward for her age?" asked a kind friend tentatively. "She does not talk at all: my little Violet says everything, and she is six months younger." Innocent words, said innocently, but boring deep, blurring every dream of the mother, setting her on the watch, destroying all her hopes, turning them into shadowy, formless fears.

Marguerite *was* backward. Nurse could not deny it, indignant though she was to hear it had been said. "There was a deal of difference between children; certainly Miss Margy might not be very ready with her tongue, but see how quick she was with her hands; why, she put on her own shoes and socks;

MARGUÉRITE

she would dress herself if she were let.” But Nurse’s words availed nothing : Mrs. Temple’s fears could not be allayed with such arguments as these.

She looked about her, saw other children, questioned her friends. Poor mother, whose heart was now all trembling, waking in earnest at last, as she clung to her baby daughter. Margy’s wistful eyes haunted her mother now, day and night. What did they say ? What were they trying to say ? “ I want all your love, Mother. I am afflicted.” That was what they said. In jest one day her father asked, stroking her curls, “ When are you going to talk, Margy ? You’re quite a little Dumbie.” The words went straight over the child’s head, straight into the mother’s quivering heart. Not a daughter to be proud of, to talk about, to hope great things for. No, only a “ little Dumbie.”

“ Mother, I am afflicted, help me to

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bear it. Love me, Mother, I can't ask you ; I am deaf and dumb."

That was what the wistful eyes, watching her round the room, said now to the fashionable woman, and seemed to blot out the world of fashion, everything but themselves.

And the love the little one dumbly asked was given to her, not by halves, not in stinted measure, but in such full stream that it floods her life ; and speaking through her mother's lips, little Margy does not miss the world of speech from which she is cut off.

VI

JESSIE

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VI

JESSIE

I AM not quite sure whether the source of Jessie Wyvern's invalidism is grotesque or sad. Perhaps the latter, if one knows how much real illness there is in the world, and what a pity it is that . . . but I had better tell it straight out, and then you can judge for yourself.

Mrs. Wyvern is a very rich woman ; nothing about her so noticeable as her wealth. It is not only that she has it ; because really, when one comes to think of it, a great many people are rich ; but she is so proud of it, so proud that she is anxious everybody else shall know. She wears it all over her, in

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diamonds and rubies and pearls and cats'-eyes, until she looks like a velvet cushion in a jeweller's shop. She shows it in a big garish house, in her scarlet satin drawing-room, in her carriages and horses. She has an unwholesome-looking husband, who also wears diamonds —in his shirt-studs and sleeve-links. In this way, and in this way only, they are a brilliant pair.

The Wyverns own a large family; that is their saving clause; without it they would be quite impossible, gilded and encrusted beyond one touch of a common humanity. Their large family just saves them. There are eleven or twelve of them, boys and girls in about equal numbers.

They are not happy children: the elder ones, who are at public schools, wince at their parents' vulgarity; the younger ones suffer under the restrictions that their wealth seems to impose. They

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have too many governesses and too many nurses, too many doctors whenever a slight nursery ailment happens ; and as for fuss, well, whenever a powder has to be taken, a physician at two guineas a visit comes to administer it and calls every day for a week to note the result. They keep a hospital nurse on the premises, in full uniform, white cap and apron, in case an accident should occur.

When one of the boys took measles at Harrow and came home with it, he was not allowed inside the door. They took a furnished house for him, a whole furnished house ; so that he should have plenty of room ; and sent him there with two nurses to watch him. Not the permanent one, they could not spare her, they never could—that was the most curious part of the arrangement. Whenever any one was really ill, they were afraid to let her look after the patient, in case anything else should occur.

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After Nelson—they all have fine names—came home with the measles, Mrs. Wyvern grew very nervous lest even his letters or his cab stopping at the door should have conveyed infection to the others. So she asked Dr. Chisel, the great child's doctor, to call in every morning for a few days to examine the children and see if they had any symptoms.

That was how the mischief occurred.

Dr. Chisel was a great man, so great that he charged two guineas for each child he saw, although there was nothing the matter and there were eight of them at home. The Wyverns did not mind. They liked to see him, they could afford it, and they asked him to dinner on the strength of his visits and thought they were "getting into society." Now whether the dinner awakened his conscience or not, I am uncertain, but undoubtedly about this time he began to

JESSIE

think he ought to do something, or find out something, that would enable him to earn his fees. And this is how he did it.

Jessica was about ten, a healthy, bright-eyed, rebellious little maiden who envied her brothers their liberty—one of those tom-boy girls who jump downstairs three steps at a time and generally upset something when they burst into a room. Now Mr. Wyvern is a fat little man who waddles, and Mrs. Wyvern a flat-footed woman who flumps. The Wyvern children are not graceful, and they all walk more or less badly. It was unfortunate for Jessica that Dr. Chisel's eye should light upon her just as he was full of conscientious scruples about doing nothing for his fees. She came to him with the others, her progress half a slouch, half a bound.

“Good Heavens!” ejaculated Dr. Chisel.

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"Ah! What's the matter?" said the mother.

But he did not tell her at once. He made Jessica walk first towards him and then away from him, and then round the room and then across the room, and she had to stand in this position and in that position, and I don't know in how many positions.

At first she felt it was rather grand, she felt rather like a heroine at being singled out from the others. Poor Jessie! The end of it was that Dr. Chisel discovered that she limped, that one leg must be a fraction shorter than the other. A thousandth part of an inch perhaps, but she was at a dangerous age—and so had better be put up in a plaster of Paris case and lie on her back and take every precaution or—or—

"Would she—would she grow out of it?" asked Mrs. Wyvern tremulously, in

JESSIE

an agony of maternal fear. Dr. Chisel said that it was possible.

Poor little Jessie ! Mrs. Wyvern's motherly love is spread thin, for it has to cover twelve children. She was very sorry for Jessie, got the most expensive couch for her to lie on, one that turned into a bed, or could be wheeled out into the street. She installed the hospital nurse as permanent attendant upon her, and got a probationer to wait on the hospital nurse. Jessie had every toy that could be found in the market, and every book that she was able to read. It did not compensate her, with the blood of young life dancing in her veins, the desire to run and to leap and to jump. She was bound down on the couch, on her back, every nerve throbbing ; and, as time went on, every bone aching ; crying at first tears of passion and anger, afterwards of weakness and despair and hopelessness. She did not

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believe in her own illness ; she knew well enough there was nothing the matter. Teddie told her, too, in his rough way when he came home for the holidays.

“ Poor old Jess,” he said, “ so you have gone to swell the triumphal car. You’ve got a swagger couch, and the mater tells everybody it cost a hundred pounds. Can’t you get up when nobody is looking ? ”

Jessie could not get up, she could not even turn her head away so that Teddie should not see the tears come into her eyes. She was never alone, they would not even let her cry by herself, but wanted to cheer her up and tell her it was all for the best, that if Dr. Chisel had not been so clever perhaps she would have had a permanent limp, or been deformed. She ought to be very thankful to him, and to her parents for giving her everything she could possibly want.

JESSIE

She was not grateful at all, poor child. She hated Dr. Chisel so much that, when he came every morning to look at her, she turned pale and red with rage. Hate grew in her heart to the exclusion of everything else, hatred born of a cruel sense of injustice. She had looked into her mother's face for sympathy, with a dumb terrible appeal for release ; she had read there a smug satisfaction at the comfort of all the arrangements, of the neat nurse and the pleasant room, and the handsome surroundings. Jessica grew to be quite the show child of the house, all the visitors were brought up to her room and were asked to condole with Mrs. Wyvern. Jessie was congratulated. " How comfortable you must be on that beautiful bed ; there's a nice lazy life you are leading. How thankful you ought to be that you have such good parents."

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Jessie hated them all, hated everybody. There grew up in the little girl's heart during the next twelve months a bitterness which will never die out. She lay and brooded over it and nursed it, and had nothing to distract her from it. Her mother is not one of those who come up in the middle of the night to see if their darlings are sleeping, and kiss them and talk to them, or kneel and pray beside them. No one ever knew all those long, terrible, wakeful night-hours, when she cried to herself, with deep sobs — suppressed so that nurse should not wake up and hear them, and soothe her with the old phrases that she knew and rebelled against. . . .

Poor Jessie ! Of course the time will come when she is pronounced cured, when she is bidden to arise and walk ; already she is allowed to sit up a certain number of hours in the day. But she is almost past caring, her spirits are

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crushed, and she will never be a happy, careless child again. There is a canker in her bud of life, the flower will never bloom as it might have bloomed.



VII

EILEEN



VII

EILEEN

SHE was staying with her aunt in the fashionable seaside town of Slowcumb. According to her lights Aunt Bessie had been very kind to Eileen ; had chosen her governesses and superintended her education. Now that the education was supposed to be over (for Eileen was seventeen) Aunt Bessie had invited her here, so that she might see something of the world before being "presented."

Aunt Bessie was very good and very kind ; nobody had ever been found to deny that. Yet it must be admitted that she was not a wise guardian for an easily influenced young girl. To begin

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with, she was a very worldly woman, who, wealthy herself, could find nothing so estimable in others as wealth, except, it might be, a title. But to have a title and wealth, why that made her ideal, the goal to which however, in spite of all her efforts, she herself had never attained. Not even a knighthood had been offered to fat old Uncle Josiah, though he had been mayor of the town three consecutive years before he died.

What Aunt Bessie had never been able to attain for herself, she thought quite within Eileen's grasp. Eileen was very pretty, soft and pale and fair, with tremulous, sensitive lips and cornflower eyes. Aunt Bessie talked to her about her beauty and about her "chances," until the girl's head was all in a whirl and it seemed to her that it would be dreadful if she disappointed Aunt Bessie —if after all no titled earl or noble lord

EILEEN

took a fancy to her pretty face and implored her to become his.

But she was nervous and shy, and doubted, every day and all day, whether she really was so pretty, whether she was not too stupid for any one to care for ; used to wonder what Aunt Bessie would say if after all her niece remained an old maid. For Aunt Bessie had her moods, and could not quite be relied upon for reason or justice if things did not go as she desired they should.

And so matters went on, and Auntie talked of love and lovers, of "chances" and "settling," and Eileen thought about nothing but her pretty face, and whether it was pretty enough to make her deficiencies forgotten ; for on the whole she was a modest little girl, and, if it had not constantly been put into her head, would not have thought of lovers for years to come.

Now Eileen was in the habit of going

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down every morning to Slowcumb beach while Auntie took her late morning nap, and sitting there with a book watching the tides, and dreaming, dreaming always, young girls' dreams, formless and inchoate as the wavelets that ebbed and flowed.

One day, whilst engaged in this engrossing pursuit, her book slipped from her hand ; and, the warmth of the summer sun and the soft sound of the water a-ripple against the stones serving her as a lullaby, she slept—slept, and never heard the crunch, crunch of the stones under the heavy tread of a masculine foot, nor knew of the black eyes that fell upon her in surprise. But of course she woke at last, woke to find Frank Molyneux standing beside her, apologising for having disturbed her, holding out her book and explaining that it had fallen until it was nearly in the water, and so . . . he had picked

EILEEN

it up. She flushed and stammered and pulled her skirts down, and tried to rise—a difficult thing on the slippery shingles ; and was as tongue-tied and shy as a young girl should be. All of which Frank found very delightful.

Well, the story is as old as the hills, this part of it at least. They met, perhaps by accident, once or twice—by appointment many times. Eileen's sensations were all confused, she did not know if she were doing right or wrong. Frank told her that he was the second son of Lord Molyneux, but that he had quarrelled with his father, and that it was impossible to ask his consent to their marriage ; therefore she must not tell her aunt nor anybody. Did she love him ? If she loved him, she would make that sacrifice for his sake ; she would consent to waive bridesmaids and wedding favours, a trousseau and presents, and marry him secretly.

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Eileen begged that she might tell her aunt ; but Frank, Frank of the dark eyes and black moustache, called her cruel, said that she would betray him, that she did not love him, that—and Eileen yielded.

The days wore on, beautiful summer days. Some feeling stirred in the girl's heart, quickened her pulses, made her fear and tremble, blush and turn pale. She knew not what she felt ; Frank's gaze fascinated her, that bold gaze of his which sought her so persistently, which haunted alike her nights and her short days. Was it love or fear ? She knew not, so called it love and promised to be his wife.

Then one night, the night before the day on which she had promised to leave Slowcumb with him, she went to bed, and slept, and dreamt.

Falling asleep, as she had done these many nights past, full of a nameless

EILEEN

trouble, a terror, an unrest, she felt that gradually, gradually but surely, all these feelings were leaving her ; and in their stead peace, that peace which passeth understanding, was over her and in the room. And the peace was luminous ; it filled the room with a shadowy glory, as of the moon in a clouded sky. "Mother," she cried, "Mother," and held out her young arms to the light : for the light spelt "Mother" to her, God's light of the world, and she knew it was that dead mother, come back at last to the child who had cost her life.

Was it a trance, or sleep, or dream ? or was it Heaven's messenger ? The misty light took form, and the form took voice. "Mother, Mother ; kiss me, Mother," and a mother's kiss, the first and the last, touched her lips gently.

"Tell your aunt," said the voice ; "tell your aunt." And then, slowly and

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gradually, the form and voice and light faded, and Eileen awoke.

I have heard the girl tell the story with eyes full of tears and voice broken with emotion. I have heard her tell how she took the words for inspiration and obeyed them literally. She jumped out of bed in the middle of the night and rushed to her aunt's room, knelt down beside her, and told her everything. The end of the history everybody knows : how Frank Molyneux was a man whose name had become too notorious for even Aunt Bessie not to have heard it, and how through her dream Eileen was saved from a fate worse than death. . . .

Perhaps it was a dream ; perhaps even from Heaven our mothers see us and protect us still. I think they do.

VIII

PHI-PHI



VIII

PHI-PHI

TEN years they had been married, ten years that ought to have been happy, golden years, illuminated with tender memories and glad with happy love.

Eric Baillie loved his wife absolutely. Home for him meant her grey eyes, the rustle of her light gowns, the creak of her foot on the stairs, the tones of her clear voice. She was the one woman in the world to him ; all the rest shadows, phantoms, less tangible than those creatures who thronged his brain and grew alive to him in the sheets of his manuscripts, alive to the world in the pages of those delightful books which

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charmed the leisure of society and made his name a household word among the toilers.

Eric was a genius, not a newspaper one, puffed into fame by a paragraph, to be extinguished by a leading article, but a real, God-made, heart-acknowledged genius, who spoke to humanity of humanity in tones that reached it, and taught lessons of sympathy and brotherhood and understanding. Eric was a genius, and Joanna knew it. Two years they were happy, giving each other all each other lacked. Joanna was rest for Eric's restless brain. Eric needed her : and that was happiness enough for Joanna until she awoke to the great want of her womanhood. But when she awoke, happiness was over for her.

Women going by with little ones in their arms seemed to look on her with pitying eyes ; every baby she saw playing in the gutter as she walked along

PHI-PHI

the streets seemed to say something to her, something that made her heart ache. Her husband's books that had children in them—children who climbed on their parents' knees, and nestled at their mothers' breasts—hurt her when she read. Where others were full, she was empty. Her empty arms, her empty rooms, her heart that Eric could no longer fill, made her days all tears. Her eyes grew heavy with weeping for the babies that haunted her nights, that she saw in her dreams, that were never to come nearer to her ; that were always to be phantom-babies with no warm limbs to fondle, no red lips to kiss. Poor Joanna ! missing these, it seemed to her that she missed everything.

Out of that home fled peace ; for Eric saw Joanna's face growing pale with sorrow, her step lagging with lack of hope, her weary tears bemoaning her childlessness. He ceased to look to her

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for sympathy ; she had no sympathy now for any woes save her own. So the years went on, and husband and wife grew apart : Eric in his shadow world which grew to reality touched with the genius of his pen ; Joanna in *her* shadow world full of the cooing of babies—which never grew to reality.

Never ! She thought it was to be never as the years went by, eight years, nine years, ten years. Then, when it seemed that hope must be over, there fell a trembling upon her, and a glimmer of light, and a fear, and then hope again, at first too tremulous for words—and at last, certainty. The springs of her nature that had run dry, renewed themselves ; and the stream of loving-kindness flowed forth. Eric found his wife again, joy touched her to sympathy ; and husband and wife were one.

Then Phi-phi came, and she thought there could be no Heaven, for Heaven



PHI-PHI

was here. The baby lay on her breast, and her eyes were suffused with happy tears, gloating over the treasure she enfolded. A baby, soft and warm, nestled against her. A flesh-and-blood baby that cried, and whose cries she hushed. Poor Joanna, or rather happy Joanna ! for the misery of it and the pathos of it and the horror of it, she never knew.

Everything she had possessed—love and sympathy and freedom from care ; but these had not sufficed her, she had wearied Heaven with her sighs, and the All-Powerful granted her prayers. She was a mother, her aching heart satisfied and her arms full. All the mystery of maternity filled her and thrilled her. She had been hungry and she had been filled ; and it seemed to her that it was enough.

Months rolled by, and the baby grew and grew, so close to his mother's heart that they two were as one, and there

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was hardly place for Eric. It grew and seemed to thrive, the limbs waxed heavy ; and pride joined love in Joanna's breast.

Eric, gifted with that great genius of his which saw beneath surface into reality, was the first to note that there dawned no intelligence in the baby eyes, the first to see that no answering beam greeted a loving smile. Brilliant, gifted Eric, who shall say what pangs were his when he recognised, almost before the physician, that the baby had stopped speechless on the very threshold of understanding !

Months grew to years ; and the very sight of the child for whom Joanna had prayed, became a terror to its father. Half-witted, heavy-headed idiot, Phi-phi, dumb and animal in his ways, shut Eric in upon himself, off from the humanity of his fellows, paralysed the pen in his hand, the thought in his brain. Phi-phi's

PHI-PHI

unseeing eyes stood between him and his dreams.

But Joanna, the mother, never saw it, never felt it, never spoke of it. When Eric, sick with misery at the thoughts which grew all blurred and dazed within him, where once they had risen clear, would turn to Joanna, mutely asking for some word of help, he found her always with the idiot child on her lap, leaning against her dress, enveloping her, as it seemed, with its hideous personality. And then, most terrible of all, Joanna would look to him for sympathy with the small strides the child would make towards the land of understanding that his feet were never to enter.

“Eric, see, he walks, he is now holding on to my finger, do look!” she would say, her eyes aglow with the pride that is the crown of happy mothers. And this when the boy had already passed seven shambling years

MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

with legs that would not carry him, with huge head rolling heavily on his crooked shoulders.

I have seen Joanna with Phi-phi. They call him Phi-phi because it is the nearest approach to human sound his poor lips have ever uttered, and Joanna, hearing even in this attempt at human speech the whole alphabet of a soul, caught up the tones gladly and called him so in love.

There they dwell in that strange household—father, mother, child. Eric, gradually, by the grace of God, out-growing the strange spell that Phi-phi wrought on him, Joanna wrapped up in this being so dependent upon her.

No more children have come to her ; and she is satisfied. Strange and mystical, but true as I write it, *this* child satisfies her. She does not complain, “ O God, give us not what we pray for but give us that which is best for

PHI-PHI

us," but thanks Him on her knees day and night for this child of her prayers. In some way that only mothers know, the very wants of him solace her. He is hers wholly. His dumb animal fondling is more to her than Eric's sad kisses. Is it infinite pity? Is it infinite love? Is it a feeling deeper still, blended with remorse that she has wrung this existence from Heaven and must protect it? I know not, but to see them together is enough. Phi-phi's mother loves him, and the loss of him would mean death to her.



IX

MY CHARLIE



IX

MY CHARLIE

DAVID DRUMMOND died suddenly ; almost before he reached his prime. With a world of work undone, he sank into the great stream of silence, leaving ever-widening circles of regret to mark where he had gone down. Poor Mary, who had clung to him and grown to him, was giddy and dazed with the abruptness of that disappearance. Trembling, frightened, unnerved, she threw out sensitive feelers for the first hold that should be offered her ; and Charlie—who had his father's broad shoulders, blue eyes, and sunny smile—Charlie it was, her eighteen-year-old son,

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who held out his hands to her and said :

“ Poor little Mother.”

Sitting in that grief-laden house, behind the drawn blinds, in the first days of her widowhood, it was the big boy who laid his head down in her lap and wept with her. And it comforted her to comfort him ; it was balm to her to caress his hair, to kiss his forehead, to murmur to him tender, loving words, and feel those sobs, that seemed to echo in his heart from hers, grow less in the caressing.

“ Charlie must be father now,” she said. “ Charlie will be father now,” she told the little brother and sisters who could not understand as he could, and were less to her in her desolateness.

Poor Mary ! she had five young children besides her eldest, four little girls and the baby boy—and Charlie must be father to them all. He had

MY CHARLIE

been in the office for six months before David Drummond's death ; it did not seem to his loving mother that the term was insufficient to make him master of the business. She trusted him, as such women will trust their men-folk ; unlimited power was given to him, unlimited authority.

Her friends—she had a large social circle and many relatives—remonstrated with her ; they pointed out that Charlie was after all but a lad, a mere schoolboy, that she was placing in his inexperienced hands not only her own future but the future of her girls. They tried to hint to her ; to remind her that Charlie had never been considered such a model boy while his father lived ; that he had left school abruptly ; that David had looked for trouble with him, and had kept him strictly under his own eye in consequence. But remonstrances were all in vain. Mrs Drummond smiled at her visitors, and

MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

said fondly, " My Charlie will look after my interests ; my boy loves his mother."

I think he did, I hope he did ; terrible, if there were not one saving clause in Charlie's character. David left his family in comfortable circumstances, with a good income from the business and a large sum of ready money from the insurance office. It was within a few months of his father's death that Charlie began to find business absorbed him until too late to come home to the family dinner. Mary believed him, sat up for him, and was rewarded when he flung his arms about her, called her " dear old mother," and thanked her. When, a year later, " business " began to absorb him until two or three in the morning, and he bade her not sit up but give him a latchkey, she was still satisfied, and went obediently to bed ; although perhaps she lay awake through

MY CHARLIE

the long hours, and listened for the sound of his footstep on the stairs.

“ Things were very bad in the city,” he told her, “ money very tight. How had she invested the insurance money? Consols! Absurd, he could do much better with it than that.”

Friends came again, told her that the business was being ruined by neglect. Charlie was to be seen at Ascot and the Derby, at Brighton and Sandown and Kempton Park. They were disregarded. The insurance money followed the rest of the capital, and after that there was silver sold to supply Charlie’s wants, and jewellery pawned to relieve Charlie’s necessities. How quickly it all seemed to go! Poverty came where there had been plenty, a debauched and degraded man where there had been a comely, handsome youth, trouble after trouble, and at last—disgrace.

Through it all, his mother believed

MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

in him. He never, even in his worst days, had aught but loving words for her. She did not believe her Charlie could have done anything wrong ; and if conscience was dead in him, and the sense of honour and truth had never lived, her faith touched him to tenderness, kept him always loving to her in his words and in his heart. With blindness half-divine she accused the judge who condemned him, the friends who abandoned him, the sisters who would repudiate him, everybody and everything, but Charlie, her Charlie. He was her first-born !

Oh, this divine sweet blindness of mothers, what a foretaste it is of that divine mercy and forgiveness, the blessed heritage of Christianity !

Charlie Drummond's delinquencies, his dissoluteness, his dishonesty, are old stories now. His young sisters are grown up and married, his young brother is

MY CHARLIE

trying hard to redeem the family name. Mrs. Drummond lives with one of those little-thought-of daughters ; daily the others visit her. They too love their mother, love her tenderly and protectingly, forgive her, nay, reverence her for the poverty she has brought upon them by her faith in Charlie, and bear with her in her unreason even now that she still believes in him.

Charlie, outcast from society, the place that has known him knowing him no more, writes long letters to her from that shabby continental town where he has taken up his abode.

These letters are her greatest happiness, almost, one would say, all that keeps her alive ; for she is old through trouble, enfeebled from heart-sickness. Poor mother ! What a beautiful figure of faith she still is, faith triumphant over all obstacles, and firm in the midst of ruins.

MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

And I believe, I, who know this mother, that her love will some day redeem that wrecked, degraded, ruined man ; that the memory of her loving eyes will rise up and confront him, and turn him from evil, that the hand he held out to her years ago when he said, " Poor little Mother," clasping hers firmly, will again bring him to the light. Mother's love, stronger than death, is stronger than the spirit of evil. Lost, degraded Charlie, with one human being to love him, cannot sink wholly. His letters prove it ; he has asked for his sisters' portraits ; he is greedy for the home news she sends him so faithfully. He has a hold on humanity ; he has a *Mother* !

X

DERRICK

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X

DERRICK

As I have said before, many women who possess children are not mothers. Derrick's was one of these. She was a feline woman, with red hair, a good figure, and an amount of restless energy that was almost uncomfortable. Home meant to her a place to have her meals in—scarcely that, for she preferred her friends' houses for lunch and a restaurant for dinner, while her breakfast she habitually took in bed. Her energy was treadmill energy that led nowhere, a restless, feverish desire to be always amusing herself, never mind how or when or where. Theatres, dinners,

MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

dances, races, anything would serve as an excuse for dressing, for going out, for rushing here, there, and everywhere, in and out of taxis, just catching a train. She was a *fin de siècle*, electric woman, all glare and brilliancy,—no repose about her. Her graceful thinness, her small hands, her quick movements, held no suggestion of a possible stillness ; she gave you the impression of perpetual motion, that if she ran down she would run out and the life in her would cease. When there was “nothing on,” when there was no form of amusement progressing in which she could partake, she went to bed with a history of violent neuralgia, and solaced herself with chloral until the next excitement.

Such a woman as this has no leisure in her life for the prattle of little voices, no time for the garrulousness of loving children looking for sympathy to Mummy’s smiling face. It is a mystery

DERRICK

to me how Derrick's mother ever found time to have children at all ; but that was in the past, and when I knew her and Derrick there were two of them : I was told there had been more. I believed it ; because not all babies can bear the cold of a motherless world, and Nita Crisp's children were motherless.

Derrick was seven when I had my first introduction to him, and Phyllis eight. It was during a lunch-party at the Crisps' house, and some one, some misguided person who did not know Nita, asked that the children might be sent for. I, who had visited there for twelve months, did not even know of their existence, but joined my voice with that of the lady who had suggested seeing them. Nita yielded, though not with her usual grace.

They came down—their very entrance into the room told the whole story : two little ones, holding each other's hand ;

MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

Phyllis, red-haired, sharp-featured, pale-faced, the very caricature of her mother ; Derrick, upright, sturdy, handsome, with sunny curls and fearless grey eyes. Babies who had not rushed to their mother's side to hide their faces in her dress, they came into the room ; the girl shy and uneasy, the boy defiant, both of them as if they knew there would be no welcome for them. Certainly they went up to their mother ; Phyllis raised her face to be kissed, and said "Good-morning." (It was four o'clock in the afternoon, but obviously they met for the first time.) When the boy would have followed his sister's example, Mrs. Crisp said with a frown :

" That will do, that will do, I hate boys kissing."

" Don't you ? " she asked, turning to me. And I, who know no happiness greater than to have my own boy, big as he is, climb on to my lap and put his

DERRICK

arms about me and call me "Mumsey darling," tell me his little joys and his little troubles, could find no answer for her.

"It's quite time he went to school," she continued, "but his father won't hear of it. He is just like a girl."

I could see the boy's cheek flush as if she had struck him. At seven a boy has feelings, is sensitive, and understands enough to suffer.

"I am not like a girl," he answered rudely.

Disregarding the child entirely, as if he were not there, she said :

"He is perfectly unmanageable too, and as obstinate and ill-tempered as a child can be. I can do nothing with him."

If anything, to the happy mother of happy children, could have been more dreadful than the expression of Nita's face as she looked at the boy, it was the

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expression on the boy's face as he looked at her. Dislike was in hers, but in the child's dislike seemed exaggerated to hatred.

I drew the boy to me, and kissed him, and began to talk to him about what he did all day and his lessons and his toys ; and in return, this child, whom his mother found unmanageable and hopelessly bad, leaned against my knee and talked of his toys as if they were living things. He told me of Wellington—a tin soldier stuck on a horse—and of how well he had led his men ; he told me of his fortress that he had just built, and of how it was surrounded by soldiers, that he had mounted a cannon on the highest part, and this afternoon there would be a great battle, but he knew the English would win as they always did. And then, in the midst of his talk, his face darkened, and looking at me, evidently in expectation of the same

DERRICK

sympathy he had had up to then, he said :

“ She,” indicating his mother, “ knew I was enjoying myself, that’s why she sent for me. Isn’t she horrid ? ”

The shock his words gave me can scarcely be imagined. To see her sit there laughing and talking and gesticulating—she was one of those women who always gesticulate when they talk, and who, I am bound to say, have great success in society—while here at my knee her son passed judgment on her, seemed to me too pitiful. And then, as he spoke, the harsh voice—for in speaking to him her very voice changed —broke in, saying : “ You can go upstairs, Derrick ; I am sure Mrs. Manvers has had quite enough of your chatter.”

This was my first introduction to Derrick ; but afterwards I grew very intimate with him. Later on, he was sent to the same day school as my own

MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

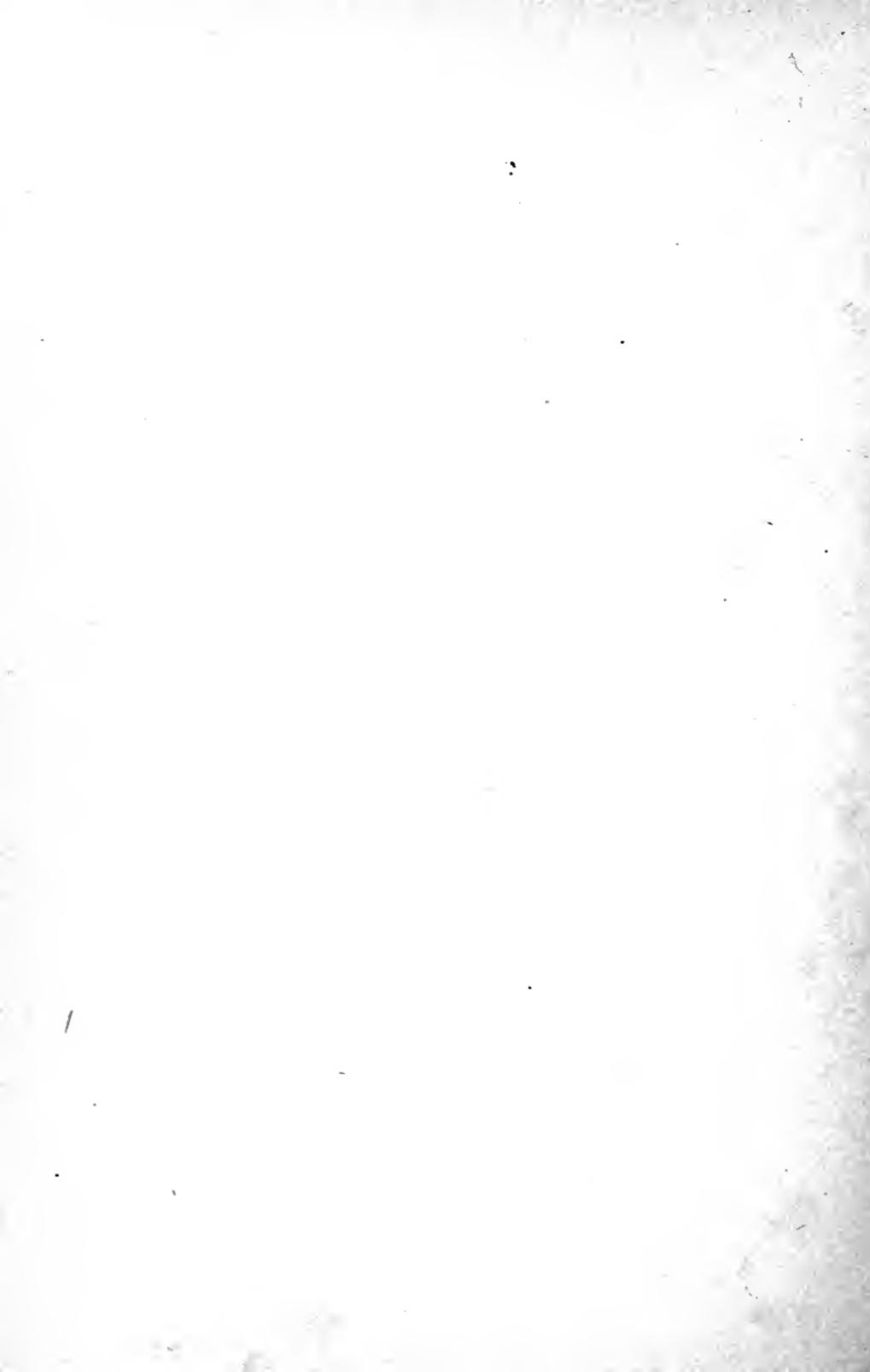
boys, and they used to bring him home to lunch and to tea, and to play with them in the afternoon.

A more beautiful-natured child I have never met : truthful and as honest as the day, generous to his playmates, affectionate and wonderfully grateful for kindness. But in one point, and one only, the boy failed in coming up to the ideal—it was when he spoke of his mother. He would say, “ It was quite enough for her to know that he wanted to do anything or to go anywhere, for her to forbid him.” In her presence he was at his worst—sullen, and ill-tempered : she never gained his confidence, she never gained his love. In his childhood he disliked her ; he has reached boyhood now, and I think, God help her, that he despises her. When he reaches manhood and she old age ; when she looks to her children for all that the world will fail to give her . . . what will Nita Crisp find ?

XI

DOUGLAS

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XI

DOUGLAS

Poor little Douglas ! Or as some would say, happy little Douglas ! He has two mothers, and yet not one. Secure in that luxurious nursery of his, surrounded by toys, guarded and cherished, where no chill from the cold world can penetrate to him, he yet misses something—something impalpable, indefinable, the lack of which makes his cheek pale, his eyes heavy, his step slow.

Douglas is an adopted child. How do his mothers see him ? They see him in two ways. To Mrs. Graham, his new mother, he is a jewel passionately wrested from alien hands to adorn her

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jewelless home. She has it, this jewel she has craved for ; yet it scarcely embellishes her, the baby that is not hers, and yet that she has made hers. It is a jewel dim in its alien setting, a grafted plant that can hardly take root.

In the nursery, of an evening, she will sit with the child on her lap, the yearning in her for maternity trying to find food as she kisses the little feet, the little hands, the sunny curls, as she clasps him to her, and tries to cool her hot eyes dim with unshed tears against the baby cheek. But yet, but yet ! while she yearns, she revolts. Even as she murmurs, "My little feet, my little hands, and hair of lily's colour," she knows the possessive pronoun is but a mockery ; hers is not the breast to which these baby-lips have clung ; she cannot soothe his fretful cry, nor can her kisses dry his tears. He is hers, hers, she will say ; and as she says it, knows it is false.

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She may strain him passionately to her, kneel down and worship the Divine Child of which to her he is the embodiment : she may, in the coming years, heap luxuries, shower benefits upon him, give him everything material that her wealth can enable her to bestow ; but never, never, never, in all the coming years will he be to her what he is to that other poor woman who has sold him for his own good ; who watches for him at the street corner as he comes out, brave in his fine perambulator ; who stands opposite his nursery window only to see him in the distance ; who bore him in anguish but parted from him in an anguish far deeper ; who can do for him what the other never could, sacrifice herself for him, die that he may live.

There are some mothers in their happy homes, warm and cosy, with their little ones round them, who will say, " Give up her baby, part with her child ? How

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terrible ! I never could do that, whatever might happen. I would work for them, starve for them ; but never part with them." And they will look round their luxurious homes, and the very words they speak will be as empty as the idle echoes in the room. They will not understand, they cannot understand, the struggles, the tortures this mother went through before she gave up her baby, and with empty arms but unbereaved spirit, thanked God she had found strength to do her duty.

Yet Aline Evans loved the boy, the baby who had come to her in the midst of her terrible sorrows, and would have worked for him, ay, and counted the work a happiness in that it kept him by her—if she had not felt that even a great mother-love could not give him what this self-effacement would give.

The wound bled, as such wounds do, bled internally ; draining life itself away,

DOUGLAS

silently, sapping the very foundations of being. Pale she grew, and paler, as she watched at that street corner, or looked up at the windows of the fine nursery, but never a throb of regret poisoned the source of that secret wound.

“ My darling,” she would murmur to herself, as, in his white clothes, his large hat and feathers, the baby came out of the big house, “ how beautiful you look. You will have everything, everything that I could never have given you, baby mine, baby mine ! I am glad.”

She was glad, with her hand pressed to her side, with her eyes tear-dimmed, her step faltering, the sobs choking in her throat. Glad ! She was glad all the day when she went back to her one room and toiled over the needlework that gave her her only means of living. She suffered, and joy and pain, making a bewildering harmony in her brain, throbbed together with a strange unison.

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Yet if John Evans had been a good man, Aline would have kept her baby. When she fled from him, after having exhausted all that woman's art could do to lure him from the downward path, she knew that her own self-respect, almost her own safety, demanded that she leave him for a time ; she knew also that if, after the birth of the child, he would come to her and tell her of repentance, tell her that he was prepared to live a different life, she would take him back as she had done before. . . .

And then, then she knew the sights that Douglas's baby eyes would behold, the sights on which his boyhood's eyes would open—slouching figure, drunken footstep, bloodshot eyes. The demon drink that held John Evans in his grasp would not loose him, no, not for woman's tears or prayers. And could she rear her baby, her little one, in such an atmosphere, teach the boy his duty to

DOUGLAS

his father, and show him the father to whom he owed the duty ? A thousand times no ! Let her heart ache in its loneliness, let the boy grow up never to breathe the name of mother in ears which yet perished for lack of that sweet word ! Rather than shadow the white young life, she would dwell herself in eternal darkness.

But it is not darkness that is coming to her, as she sits there sewing, and thinking of the father who is her duty, of the baby who is her highest earthly joy. The pale phantom that sits by her side, growing more visible with every throb of that gaping wound, made when she gave away the child, will show her the way to eternal light ; and some day she will say, as another mother said, “ The crystal bars shine thin between the souls of child and mother ” ; and she will watch over Douglas from where there will be no pain in the watching and no distance.



XII

GERALD

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XII

GERALD

GERALD was not always an invalid. He had been delicate, as all Mrs. Frazer's children were delicate, but seemingly he had outgrown that. All the others were girls ; Gerald the only boy. To hear his mother speak of him, to see her look at him, you would imagine him the only boy in the world. So he was—to her. The girls were all very well, nice little dumpy things with brown eyes and curly hair. Gerald promised to be tall. At twelve years old he measured nearly five feet ; his hair was fair and he had blue eyes. He went to a grammar-school in the neighbourhood : the Frazers were not

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well off : he was the head boy in his class and captain of the junior cricket eleven.

On Wednesday afternoons, Mrs. Frazer would walk all the way to the Common, never mind how hot the sun might be, and would stand for a whole hour or more, just for the pleasure of seeing him in his white suit and striped cap, standing up at the wicket. Some people might have thought him indistinguishable from the other boys at such a distance, but she knew him, and it made her heart glad and her eyes brighten to watch him. She said he stood differently to the other boys, more upright it seemed to her, and with a nobler carriage of his small cropped head. When he made a run, she thought it the most wonderful run of the day ; and when he was caught out, or bowled out, she thought it a cruel injustice, and always expected the umpire would interfere and send him in again.

GERALD

But “breaking-up day” was her great treat. She used to shiver with excitement as she sat on one of those narrow benches with the other parents ; in front of her the platform—its table heaped with books, over which the Head Master and the Dignitary who was to give away the prizes beamed approbation ; behind her the boys in their Eton jackets—bright young faces watching restlessly from the body of the hall. First there would be the usual speech, and the Chairman would say that certain boys had greatly distinguished themselves. At that, she would turn round and put her hand upon her husband’s, and say in an excited voice :

“ Did you hear that, Father ? That’s our Gerry ; I know it is.”

And presently, when she heard “ First prize for Latin—Master Gerald Frazer,” her eyes would fill with proud and happy tears as he marched forward, looking so

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shy, and came away bowing so awkwardly with the book in his hand. And he would scarcely have got into his place, before the Head called out: "First prize for history, or for grammar, or for conduct—Master Gerald Frazer": so that, at last, the giver of the prizes would note the number he had taken, and would say jestingly, "You will have to get a carriage and four to take them all home."

The other boys would laugh, and cheer him, and clap their hands; and then Mrs. Frazer's eyes would be so full that they ran over; nor could she see the look that Gerald gave her—the look, so sympathetic and so understanding, so shyly boyishly pleased with himself.

That last prize-giving was the happiest moment of Mrs. Frazer's life. All the books had been given away, and all the people were going out. Gerry had

GERALD

joined them—the mother taking some of the books, the father the others : and as they stood talking, an eager, jolly trio, a boy ran up, and touched his hat, and said, “ If you please, the Dean would like to speak to you.” Then they went back and into the study, and there they found three or four masters as well as the Head and the Dean. Gerald was shaken hands with, and congratulated ; and Mrs. Frazer thought they all looked at him so admiringly, and then she was told why they had been sent for. Said the Dean :

“ Gerald was such a good boy. Gerald was such a clever boy, a credit to the school, ahem ! a credit to his parents. They thought—he and the Head Master thought—he might, if he worked hard next term, get a scholarship, an open scholarship at Eton, and it would be a pity, unless of course they had other views, that he should miss this opportunity.”

MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

And then he was patted on the head and encouraged and dismissed, to think it over. Mr. and Mrs. Frazer went out of the room in a dream, scarcely remembering to say "Good-bye."

Gerald at Eton ! It had seemed so out of their reach. Mr. Frazer had been there, and so had Mrs. Frazer's brothers, but times had changed. That Gerald should go, Gerald ! It took their breath away.

"He shall, he shall," gasped out his mother, "if I have to starve for it. Oh, Father ! at Eton, our boy—think of it."

They did think of it, long and earnestly, that night and all through the vacation. Mr. Frazer was a merchant, but things were not prosperous with him. Still, if Gerald got a scholarship . . . and so at length it was decided.

Gerald was so light-hearted, so happy, like a mad puppy about the house ; you could hear him jumping downstairs,

GERALD

three steps at a time, whistling as he went. He had no doubt about the scholarship, not he. He knew he would get it. He hugged his mother and left her cap all crooked, he laughed at his father's chaff and sparkled back his answers ; he gave his sisters "piggy-backs" all round the garden, and amused himself by teaching them their lessons backwards.

"One term more, mother, one term more," he said when his vacation was over, "and I'll be at Eton."

"And leave me," she said, almost reproachfully, "you don't think of that."

"Don't I ?" he answered in a low voice, and flung his arm round her neck. Ah, and he wasn't ashamed to hide his face against her for a moment.

"That's the only drawback," he said, and kissed her.

Gerald loved his mother passionately.

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All boys don't, nor all girls either for that matter ; but I think when love lacks, it lacks on both sides.

It is terrible to me to tell this story. Gerald was carried home three days after the term began, "he had had a fall in the playground." His father and one of the young masters carried him upstairs ; he was very pale, quite unconscious. Nobody knew how it had happened. His mother was stunned at first, mercifully stunned, so that her agony came to her gradually. And she learned to bear it. He suffered at times, but he was a manly little fellow. "I'm all right, mother," he would say. "I'm all right, don't you fret, it's only my back."

But, O God ! when they told her the truth—they had to tell her because nobody else must tell *him* ! Only his mother could break that news. She had

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borne him in pain ; but that pain might have been eternal and yet never touched the fringe of this one. She could not tell him at first ; she was sick, her lips turned white, her eyes grew large and dark—the anguish that leapt into them when the blow was given, never died out again.

“ You must tell him that he will have to give up all idea of ever going back to school. You must wean him from all that talk about Eton. You must explain that he will never . . . that he will never—” even the doctor could hardly do it, he had to turn his face away so that he could not see her eyes—“ he will never be quite like other boys again.”

“ He never was . . . he never was.” And the father burst out into heavy, terrible sobs, the sobs that tear a man’s manhood from him and leave him weak. She had no tears and no words, but her heart echoed his. “ He never was, our

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Gerry never was like other boys ; like other people's children."

She told him, told him lying down on the bed beside him, with a break in her voice worse than tears, with an agony in her few words that vibrated through him.

" You will never be quite strong again, darling ; never run about as you used."

Perhaps he did not understand ; perhaps it was true that he was not quite like other boys. When she had told him, he said, " Poor mother, poor mother," and stroked her cheek.

If he had said anything else I think she would have died. It seemed as if her head was clasped in an icy band, and there was another round her heart. But when he said, " Poor mother," and caressed her, the bands broke and she began to cry—and—and—but leave them together. They must comfort each other.

XIII

GLADYS

XIII

GLADYS

GLADYS is tall and fair, with long curly hair and blue eyes. She is graceful, clever, and attractive, with possibilities in her that make her infinitely pitiful. Yes, infinitely pitiful ; I have not erred in my choice of words. She has a heart and intelligence which, rightly cultivated, might be making a noble woman of her ; she has more than her share of talents, she has all the advantages that wealth can give her. And yet, to watch her development makes one's heart ache ; at least it makes mine ache, and I have known her all her life.

Her mother is a weak woman to whom

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no tiller that guides a human life should have been entrusted ; an indolent woman who can see a ship drifting towards the rocks, and sit down and watch it : a woman who loves her children for her sake, not theirs, and loves them superficially ; a woman who, ill-mated, has accepted her ignoble choice as a martyrdom, and finds an excuse in it for all the shortcomings of her own shallow nature.

She married for money ; she has the money, and with it a husband who, if uncouth, unrefined and of ungentle birth, at least loves her and respects her, and puts his honour in her hands. She has not soiled it, but she has not guarded it ; her hands are so inert, so idle, so weak, that it has slipped through them at times and grown soiled. All the world, their world, knows of Reuben Carson's passionate temper, and Reuben Carson's social lapses, his love of the money he

GLADYS

has made with such perseverance, his little vanities, his little meannesses.

All this and more has slipped through his wife's white hands, hands that have never been held forth in helpfulness to the big, common, untaught man whose nature she has never taken the trouble to fathom. Plaintively, she will tell us that she has no social ambitions—"how can she with such a man as Reuben?" no ambitions for her children—"what chance have they with such a father?" Supine, she lolls back upon the satin cushions of her cee-spring carriage, and finds the interest of her life in driving from dressmaker to dressmaker, from shop to shop, spending his money aimlessly, without benefit and without enjoyment.

She possesses two children.

The boy has his father's face and figure; therefore she thinks it impossible to turn him into a "gentleman." So

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thinking, she has let him go to a school such as his father went to. With the sarcasm that is so easy, and saves her such an infinity of trouble, she says, "If it was good enough for the one, it is good enough for the other." There can be no progress upward for Reuben Carson's heir, says his mother.

The other child is Gladys, fair-haired Gladys, with the blue eyes, that remind Mary Carson of the time when she was herself a girl, and arouse in her, in spite of herself, some pride, or vanity, that stands for maternal love.

In fact she can be proud of both children. From the boy at school come such reports as must gladden the heart of any mother if she have a heart at all. From Gladys's governesses come such accounts as rouse even her mother to temporary exertion.

Of course, Mrs. Carson's deprecatory remarks about herself, her husband, even

GLADYS

about the children, do not alter as the years roll on ; it is a pose she has selected and she cannot alter it. But it is only a pose now. Jack is going to Harrow, and she says there are plenty of *tradesmen's* sons at Harrow ; and Gladys, her Gladys, is “ being cultivated.”

She plays the piano ; when there is company, she is sent for from the school-room to exhibit her accomplishment. It is the fashion in the circle to pity Mrs. Carson, “ with such a husband, poor thing,” and they show their sympathy by praising indiscriminately the talent of her daughter. Gladys thinks she is Madame Schumann at least. Gladys draws ; her drawings are handed round : she paints ; her paintings are framed and hung on the drawing-room walls. Mrs. Carson confesses to no pride in her daughter, she sneers at her and comments on her faults in public ; but she actually exerts herself to go from

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one end of London to the other in search of a new dress for Gladys, a hat or a coat that shall be unique, that shall outshine all her neighbours.

Gladys, surfeited with indiscriminate praise, resents any fault-finding bitterly ; it is unwisely and unevenly distributed, and can have no good effect. Her vanity grows apace, and she studies to exhibit instead of studying to *know*. No words that will sink into her heart and deepen its channels, are ever spoken to her. Surfaces alone are touched upon ; and soon she will think there are only surfaces, and the years will find her shallower. Vanity, greed of praise, no moral strength—these are the pitfalls her mother's useless hands are slowly digging. She is taught to despise her uneducated father. She will, of herself, learn contempt for the mother who sees everybody's failings and alters nobody's. Mrs. Carson despises Reuben whom she

GLADYS

married for his wealth ; perhaps, deep down in her consciousness, she despises herself for having so married.

Gladys after all is only a child, and sees with a child's eyes, eager, absorbing. She imbibes the spirit of the household, the spirit Mrs. Carson breathes, the spirit of dissatisfaction. She is growing arrogant and contemptuous. "Papa is inferior to Mamma, and I am superior to them both," is her mental attitude. She accepts her fine clothes from the one, her pony and pretty bracelets and rings from the other ; but her education is teaching her nothing—not even gratitude. She is growing up without love, without reverence—a modern child in a modern age. That is why I am sorry for Gladys.



XIV

NORMAN

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XIV

NORMAN

NORMAN lives by the sea. From the window of his little bedroom he looks down on the gold sand melting into deep brown where the waves caress it, tenderly, with their white foam fringes. Norman's playfellows are the strange weeds that he finds on the beach, the shells the sea rejects, the creatures left by the ebbing tide in the rocky crevices and pools, the flotsam of Nature, the rejected of the underworld of waters. For him, the grey of the sea changes to green, and dissolves into the deep purple of the horizon ; for him, the wild wind dashes against the stone walls of the house ; and

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the roar of the tempest is the music of his dreams.

But wilder than the winter waters and more tumultuous than the winter tempest, is the heart of his mother, that poor mother. A woman—yes, a woman who had been a girl with tender dreamings, heart full of love and gentleness, whose first maternity had brought with it that strange sweet gush of overwhelming joy which only maternity brings ; and who now—now, with Norman alone left to her of the three lusty boys she bore, cannot look at him without a shuddering horror, a fear that has turned even her mother-love sour on her lips.

Poor mother ! Poor child ! In that small fishing-village of Seacombe, where their history is unknown, there are none to pity and none to condemn. That is why Ursula Travers came here. That is why, when she struggled into life

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again after a shock that left her husbandless, almost childless, she came here to gather up her energies, to breathe after her breathless horror, to be alone with her child, to watch him ; and, as she grew stronger, to pray for him. Norman, grey-eyed, sturdy Norman, eight years old now, unconscious alike of watching and prayers, plays happily on the shore.

None know Ursula's story—not the old clergyman, so old that through his world-weary eyes the face of his new parishioner fades into the faces of all his other parishioners (while beyond and above them all, through the stained-glass windows, he sees, growing clearer every Sunday, the welcoming light of that heaven he preaches) : not the young doctor, fresh from the hospital wards, finding in flirtations with village girls the only outlet for his rusty energies. Neither of these, nobody. Ursula once

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so guarded, once so cherished, is alone with her terrible secret.

George Travers, light-hearted, debonair, gay, artist and Bohemian, the epitome of summer, wooed and won her in the space of one moon's birth and fading, one harvest moon. Their vows were interchanged when the ripe corn waved golden in the sun, and the bountiful earth flung forth all her treasures. George's palette and brush were all his fortune, but what of that—was not love enough for them both? Alas! Love was enough while it lasted—a short, brief space of time.

George the gay, with his blue eyes and sunny curls, George the lover, with his tender speeches and caresses, grew into George the husband, idle, indifferent and careless. He set foot on the downward road, and she toiled miserably after him. His idle hand lost its skill, his roving eye forgot to observe; poverty

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pursued them, overtook them and became their inseparable companion. Each home Ursula knew was lowlier, shabbier, less home-like than the last. George, no longer debonair, but sloven, began to find inspiration only in the wine-cup ; Ursula knew happiness only at the cradle of her little ones.

Then came the tragedy. Such a tragedy ! It rang through England, shook the hearts of the happy wives and mothers, thrilled them with pity and horror as they read. George, George the drunkard, grown mad with alcohol and failure, saw dreadful shapes that leered and threatened, serpent forms that day revealed and night could not shut out. They stood between him and his wife, between him and his children. The wretched, wretched man must seize them, choke them, kill them ; and in this wild pursuit of the terrible phantasmagoria of his wrecked brain, two

MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

sleeping babies went home, and the red cry of "Murder" rang horrible through the quiet street.

Was it justice when they found a verdict of "insanity," and sent him to end his few remaining days at Broadmoor Asylum? Ursula, unaware that it was mercy and not justice, reads a thousand horrors into Norman's grey eyes and quiet brow, hears in the boy's merry shout the maniac yell that was her husband's legacy.

But her prayers will be heard and her poor heart will find healing. The time will come when that young doctor, hearing her story, will tell her that a wide river separates delirium tremens from hereditary insanity, teach her to steer her boy's steps into safety. Norman will be her comfort in the days that have to come; his fair ingenuous face will outshine all the past. She will learn not to look on him with dread, but only

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with love and thankfulness and gratitude to Him who, from out of the wreck of her life, has given her this other, linked with hers, to remind her of a Mercy boundless and inexhaustible.

THE END





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